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SUBJECT: PROBLEMS PLAGUE BEGINNING OF VOTER REGISTRATION

Ref: KHARTOUM 1165

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: After two weeks of voter registration for the first general elections in Sudan in over 20 years, observers say the dearth of information about when, where and how to register has confused potential registrants. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) has reported far more people registered than observers have seen actually registering; most registrars appear not to be following established registration procedures for verifying residency within the constituency, and instances of fraud and intimidation have been reported. Opposition parties report that they have been unable to register their party agents, and have complained that the NEC has authorized military personnel to register near their duty stations rather than in the constituencies in which they reside. In response to complaints, the NEC has added seven additional countries to those where Sudanese may register to cast an absentee ballot. Despite the NEC's responsiveness, the many problems with the registration process will require continued robust participation by international and domestic observers. End Summary.

VOTER EDUCATION INFORMATION LACKING

12. (SBU) Voter registration opened quietly on November 1, with no fanfare, few public announcements and almost no public information campaigns. Although the elections budget and voter registration plan both called for a major voter education campaign, the NEC did not roll out the promised mass media campaign. One week before registration began, NEC instead delegated the responsibility for informing the public about registration to the political parties, telling them for the first time, that it was their obligation to notify voters about where and when to register (Ref.) Parties complained openly that they had no funding or other assistance from NEC or the Political Parties Affairs Council (PPAC) to fulfill this mandate. Numerous potential voters, even well educated and wealthy citizens, have told us that the lack of information about the registration process has left them confused and frustrated.

13. (SBU) Observers note that the numbers of voters reported registered by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) far exceeds the numbers of voters likely to have registered individually, given first hand observations of the registration locations.

LOCATIONS OF REGISTRATION UNITS UNKNOWN

14. (SBU) The NEC has yet to publish a list of locations for mobile units conducting the registration. Although the NEC contends that registration centers are open from 8:00 am until 6:00 pm, observers said that opening and closing times do not appear to be uniform throughout the country. On November 8, the Khartoum Monitor stated

"Voter registration is not being made accessible to the common man and women in the villages that the (voter registration) information needs to reach. Even in urban areas, people do not know where to register." In a memorandum dated November 12, Northern opposition parties told the NEC that the minimal publicity about locations of registration centers done on the local news and internet were insufficient. (Note: Few Sudanese have internet access. End Note) and urged NEC to broadcast the information via radio and newspapers, and to post it on public transportation and in mosques and churches.

The memo also noted that once the mobile registration center moved to a new location, staff at the center refused to register individuals from the former location. Staff refused on the basis that the registration center had moved into another constituency. In its November 2 statement, the Carter Center highlighted the connection between insufficient information on voter registration and electoral disenfranchisement.

OPPOSITION UNABLE TO REGISTER PARTY AGENTS

15. (SBU) At a November 4 meeting, a high-ranking member of a Northern opposition party told poloffs that opposition party members seeking accreditation as party agents, in order to observe the process on behalf of the party, have been rejected. Moreover, the representative alleged, NCP agents are present and highly visible at the registration locations the representative had visited. According to the November 12 opposition party memo, staffers in NCP tents erected outside registration centers in some constituencies fraudulently represent themselves as registrars. Northern opposition parties have complained to poloffs for months that they have been unable to mobilize their constituents due to lack of

KHARTOUM 00001281 002 OF 003

funding and restriction of their political space by the security services. The memo points out that the NCP has devoted enormous resources to the registration effort, and is even paying for transportation and other "incentives" for registration staff, a practice the memo calls illegal.

INSUFFICIENT TRAINING FOR REGISTRATION STAFF

16. (SBU) According to individuals close to the process, the NEC decided to discontinue training for voter registration staff a week before registration began. Instead, the NEC decided to rely on state election officials who had either sufficient experience or time to conduct local training. As a result, the voter registration staff is largely untrained, prone to errors and susceptible to fraud, claims Jerome Leyraud, Country Director for the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). Observers who visited registration centers throughout the first week of registration noted that registration is taking only 30 seconds to a minute to conclude, with registrars asking no questions to determine the individual's ties to the constituency or other information. They reported that registration consisted only of handing the applicant a slip of paper, which the individual should produce in April in order to vote. They also said they witnessed no registrars refer to training manuals. (Note: Although 30,000 staff training manuals were produced with U.S. Government funding and provided to the NEC, it is unclear how many have been distributed, or at what locations. End Note)

POLITICS SENDS MIXED SIGNALS TO REGISTRANTS

7.(SBU) The unresolved political dispute between the National Congress Party (NCP) and Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) on the referendum law and census issues, in addition to SPLM and opposition party boycott of the National Assembly, has soured the prevailing political atmosphere. A group of Sudanese businessman complained to poloffs November 7 that the wrangling and posturing by political parties have left potential voters uncertain about whether to participate in the process.

DIASPORA VOTERS PROTEST EXCLUSION

18. (U) The NEC originally announced that absentee voter registration and voting would take place in Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, the UK, the United States and Belgium, but provided no rationale for the selection of those locations. Potential voters in countries with a significant Sudanese population, such as Canada, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia, were vocal in protesting their exclusion from the process. In response to the public outcry, the NEC told poloffs that it had added seven additional countries to the list of countries in which Sudanese citizens may register to vote: Canada, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Libya, Yemen and Malaysia. The NEC told poloff that refugees in neighboring countries will be unable to register because they do not have Sudanese passports; nor can they return to Sudan to register, because they cannot meet the five year residency requirement.

FRAUD AND INTIMIDATION ALLEGED

19. (SBU) Even before voter registration began, political parties, the media and some would be voters alleged political party intimidation and preparations to commit voter fraud. In the first week of registration, Emboffs received reports of examples of fraud and intimidation.

Other diplomatic missions and observers corroborated these reports during a NEC Policy Committee Meeting on November 12. Reports include:

- Registration staff allowing persons to register to vote in two constituencies, their place of residence and their place of work;
- Individuals confiscating newly registered voters' registration receipts which are needed to vote in April;
- Individuals purchasing newly registered voters' registration receipts;
- Registration staff failing to check documentation and allowing registration by secondary school students under 18, the legal voting age;
- Political parties conducting fraudulent door-to-door voter "registration";

KHARTOUM 00001281 003 OF 003

- Political party intimidation of registrants at registration centers.

NEC CHANGES RULES MIDSTREAM

110. (SBU) In their memo, the opposition parties also complained that the NEC had authorized military personnel to register near their duty stations rather than in the constituencies in which they reside. The parties noted that this was done with no prior public notice and, without discussion by the NEC. The memo also claimed that the parties observed that the procedure for registering military personnel has been changed. In the first days of registration, individual members of the military came to the registration locations to register. Later, officers compiled lists of their troops, and completed the registration procedure on their men's behalf.

SOUTH "SEIZED WITH REGISTRATION"

111. (U) In Southern Sudan, GOSS President Salva Kiir addressed his constituents on the eve of the start of registration, calling on all people of voting age to register to vote. However, a Presidential Order declaring seven days (November 11-17) of public holiday throughout Southern Sudan to enable elected government officials, to mobilize for voter registration was subsequently withdrawn. In Juba, the U.N. Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), Sudanese civil society

groups and international NGOs kicked off the process on October 31 with a parade. On November 5, the Episcopalian and Catholic Archbishops of Juba registered jointly and called on all clergies to "preach the message of registration" throughout the month Of November. One observer noted, "Southern Sudan is suddenly seized with the registration process."

¶12. (SBU) COMMENT: NEC apparent willingness to make changes, such as expanding the list of countries where Sudanese may register to cast an absentee ballot, is encouraging. Nonetheless, the long list of problems observed during the first half of the registration process argues for continued robust participation in the observation process by international and domestic observers if the elections are eventually going to meet international norms.

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